



Personalize Rewards to Strengthen Manager-Employee Relationships

By Ben Levenbaum, CEO Xceleration

Everyone takes pride in giving the perfect gift. Whether we're celebrating a friend's birthday or a co-worker's work anniversary, it is a natural reaction to want our gifts to have meaning, show thoughtfulness, and of course, be useful. But the stakes between giving personal and professional gifts are quite different. Buy your best friend a sweatshirt that's two sizes too small and he or she will certainly forgive you. Award your employee of 25 years with a choice between a beach bag and a candlestick and they'll consider your company cheap and your value in their dedication meaningless.

Corporate rewards and incentives represent a \$90B industry, all focused on a reward being earned or given to valuable employees, partners or customers. No matter the company or reason for recognition, the end goal is to deliver meaningful rewards that show they value your performance and loyalty. The focus of the Incentive industry has long been the concept that the best rewards make use of "Trophy Value," offering recipients a long-lasting feeling of appreciation for their effort. As an example: the employee who redeems their points or contest winnings for a Big screen TV that sits in their living room for the next 10 years. Providing a constant reminder of their hard work and how it was valued.

Today's best incentive programs are taking this concept a step further – driving not only trophy value but also the personal touch that has been previously reserved for personal gift giving.

A great example is the implementation of a Birthday or Work Anniversary program where the Manager is responsible for choosing the gift for their employees. Without gift cards to make their decision easier, we are seeing these programs focus on ensuring Managers are engaging with their employees, understanding their hobbies, likes and dislikes. In turn, the employees understand that there was a level of thought that went into the gift. As companies move to more significant, sometimes completely, remote workforces the bonds between Manager and Employee will become an even more important part of each company's culture. Finding ways to enhance these relationships will help drive engagement across your organization.

To the HR executive who claims "points are so much easier" – I agree! And I am not suggesting that every reward should be selected by an employee's manager. Point programs that provide a global currency for recognition and give employees choice of how and when to redeem for rewards should remain the staple of your recognition strategy. However, as remote employees earn and redeem their points from home without the normal office interactions, the question to ask is are you doing everything you can to optimize your overall investment in rewards and recognition? By targeting opportunities to enhance your programs with more Manager involvement, you will get the best of all worlds: Trophy Value Rewards with an added benefit of building relationships throughout your organization.